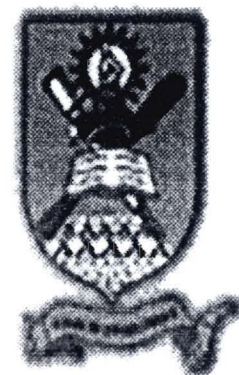


National University of Science and Technology

Think in Other Terms



DEPARTMENT OF JOURNALISM AND MEDIA STUDIES

ELECTIONS AND NATIONAL IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN ZIMBABWE: A
TEXTUAL STUDY OF *THE HERALD* (2000-2013)

BY

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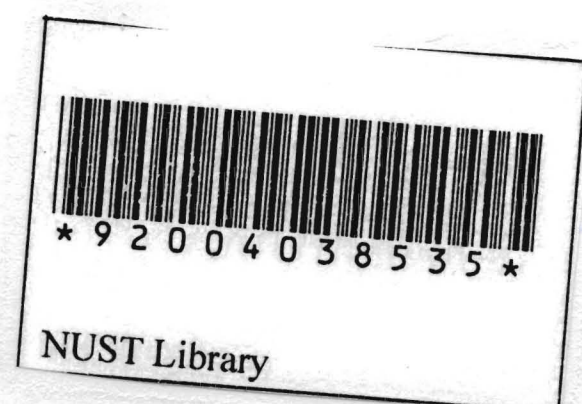
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Abstract

Zimbabwe's post-colonial nation building exercise suggests a severe fracture manifesting in non-cohesive political practices. Elections since 1980 have been fraught with violence and intimidation all pointing to intolerance and exclusionary tendencies and therefore provide the best reference for inquiring about national identity construction especially in mediated discursive practices. The study is premised on a post-modernist understanding of national identity and concedes that identity construction is a discursive practice, which establishes the media's critical position in the representation of identity. The textual study particularly focused on *The Herald*, arguably a state publication reflecting dominant discursive representations of Zimbabwean identity formulations. Seven articles were purposively selected from the period 2000-2013 covering 7 national elections conducted during this period. The range of national identity constructions and the major social actors in *The Herald's* election discourse were assessed using Critical Discourse Analysis which provides both a theoretical grounding and an analytical framework for the study. It is concluded that the newspaper's exclusive coverage of ZANU PF's election campaign represented partisan national identity formulations with conspicuous dichotomisation of "insiders" and "outsiders" through the discursive process of "othering". In the period under study, national identity in *The Herald* is shaped through four distinct thematic issues that pervade the election discourse, that is, land ownership, deification of Mbuya Nehanda, the liberation struggle and anti-colonialism and economic empowerment. President Robert Mugabe was used as the sole articulator of national identity formulations much to the exclusion of other political players with a potential of providing identity counter-narratives in the political landscape. The study concludes that *The Herald* facilitated primordial representations of national identity which were ZANU PF's expedient racial, ethnic and partisan political constructions based on autochthonous claims of territorial belonging. In the normative sense, *The Herald* failed to capture the multifaceted nature of Zimbabwean society by closing space for diverse imaginations of national identity.